SITREP – 5, 1600 Hrs on 27/05/2025

Sinking of MSC ELSA 3 (IMO no – 9123221, Flag Liberia) South West of Kochi

1. Incident Overview:

On 24 May 2025 at approximately 1300 hrs IST, the container vessel MSC ELSA 3, operated by MSC Ship management Ltd., developed a severe starboard list while enroute from Vizhinjam to Kochi, about 30 nautical miles southwest of Kochi Port. By 1515 hrs IST, the list had increased to 30 degrees and stabilized, with no further progression observed.

Figure 1: MSC ELSA 3

2. Response Actions Initiated:

The Indian Coast Guard has deployed three capital ships along with aerial surveillance (Do-228 sorties) to monitor oil pollution and drifting containers. ICG's Samudra Prahari and ETV Water Lily departed Mumbai on 26th May 2025, and are expected to reach Kochi on 28th and 30th May 2025, respectively. MSC has mobilized four company representatives to Kochi to coordinate response efforts

with ICG, MMD, and other relevant authorities. The single point of contact for the operation from MSC has been established, with local assets being engaged to support recovery efforts. The crew remains in Kochi for debriefing and statements towards Preliminary investigation being done by MMD Kochi.

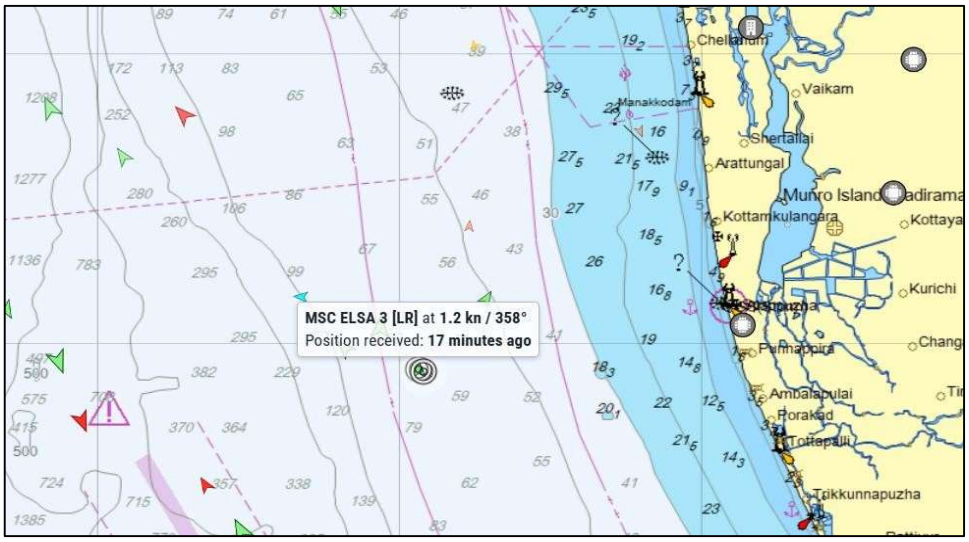

Figure 2: MSC ELSA # position at 2130 hours on 24th May 2025

3. Present Status:

MSC has mobilized three shore-based teams, currently deployed across key locations in Alleppey (6-member team), Kollam (9-member team), and Thiruvananthapuram (4-member team) where containers have beached. These personnel are stationed on-site to support recovery efforts. Customs authorities have been informed and are present at these locations to facilitate inspection and handling.

Two tugs[1] have been chartered by T&T Salvage (ETA 3 days) and an additional small tug in Kochi is under assessment for immediate deployment. A tug from Kollam is authorised for high-tide operations, with more tugs and fishing trawlers being arranged.

To retrieve the containers, four road trailers were mobilized, however, due to remote access challenges and terrain constraints, the operation was not fully

[1] Offshore Warrior and Nand Saathi

successful. The areas attempted include Shaktikulangara, Parimanam, Chavara, and Kochu Azeekal. Of the four trailers, three remain on-site while one trailer, originally deployed to Shaktikulangara, is being withdrawn.

In support of loading operations, one crane has been mobilized by MSC's local office to assist at container locations in Kollam district. In addition, MSC is seeking to engage a tug from Kollam Port to secure containers from the seaside and tow them to the designated customs storage area.

Figure 3: Crane mobilised to recover container washed ashore

In Alleppey district, a crane positioned by local authorities is already stationed near one beached container. MSC is arranging for a road trailer to collect this container and transport it to the designated customs area in Kollam Port.

Plastic Pellets (Nurdles) have been observed along the shoreline near Thiruvananthapuram, with approximately 15–20 bags spotted in the vicinity of Varkala. Immediate manual clean-up operations have been initiated at the site to mitigate environmental impact. Local response teams in Alleppey and Kollam have been tasked with investigating potential additional nurdle spills and are coordinating closely with the State Disaster Management Authority (DMA).

4. Additional Support:

Coordination with disaster and environmental authorities is ongoing. MSC contacted the State Disaster Management Authority regarding Tier 1 oil spill response equipment. While the Authority confirmed that no such equipment is

available, they provided contact details for local vendors who may be able to assist.

Marine support efforts have faced weather-related delays. Three fishing boats arranged by MSC India and four boats arranged by local authorities were unable to deploy from Shaktikulangara due to adverse conditions. To supplement this, MSC have reached out to the local fishing community to provide trawlers or boats. Five trawlers are expected to be available for deployment soon.

The Indian Coast Guard was approached for assistance in locating floating containers and providing tug support to prevent them from drifting ashore. One container location was shared; however, due to the shallow depth (less than five meters), tug deployment at that location may not be feasible.

ICG is applying dispersants to the offshore oil sheen, and plans for capping leaks from the vessel are being developed by the salvors. MSC is liaising with ICG regarding Tier 1 equipment. ICG currently holds 3,000 litres of Oil Spill Dispersant (OSD) in usable condition and an additional 8,000 litres of OSD that expired in 2021. Sample testing will be conducted to assess its viability for use if required.

5. Situation Assessment:

A total of 35 beached containers have been identified by Customs MSC's local office along a 120 km coastal stretch, with personnel being mobilized accordingly. Designated safe areas for storage are identified and container numbers of recovered units are being verified against the manifest, and open or damaged containers are being examined under customs supervision. MSC will continue to deploy personnel accordingly to these sites. The Coast Guard continues aerial surveillance; no hazardous containers have been found as yet.

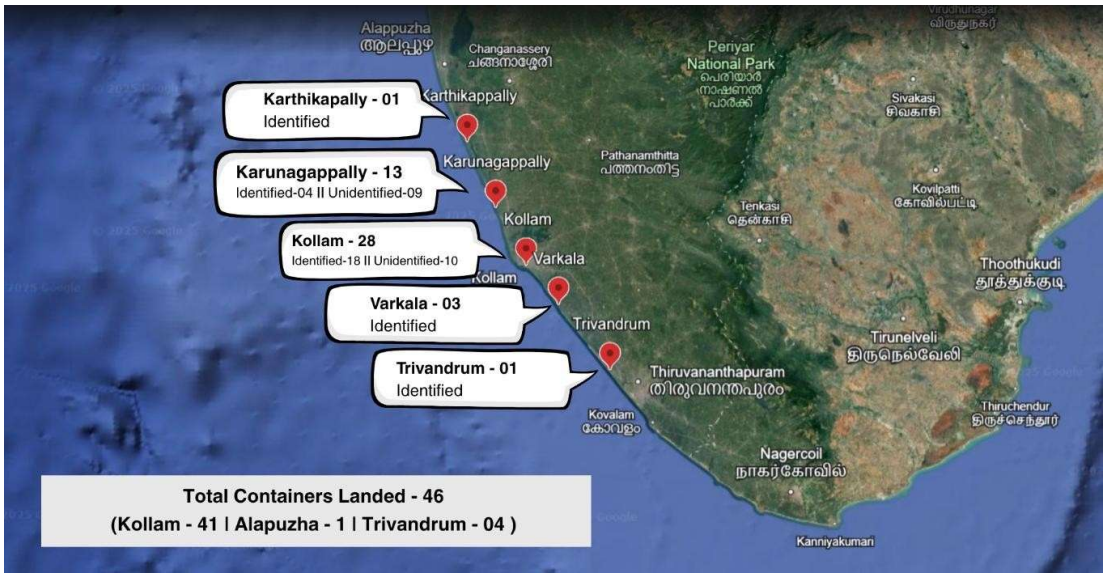

Figure 4: Containers recovered on the Coastline

One laden container (THRU 6850799) was successfully brought ashore by local vendors (WATERLINE) appointed by MSC Cochin. The container was lifted using a shore crane deployed by MSC Cochin.

6. Environmental Risks:

The adrift containers not only pose a navigational hazard but also represent a significant environmental threat, particularly given the nature of the cargo involved. The vessel was carrying approximately 367 tonnes of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and 64 tonnes of Diesel Oil at the time of the incident. With the wreck located in close proximity to the Kerala coastline, there is a heightened risk of an oil spill. Such a spill could have serious ecological consequences, including damage to marine biodiversity, coastal ecosystems, and local fisheries. Immediate containment and recovery measures are essential to mitigate the potential impact on the environment and nearby coastal communities.

Figure 5: Container drifted on shore

7. Coordination Measures

A series of coordination meetings on 24, 25, 26 and 27 May 2025, chaired by DG Shipping with participation from ICG, IFC-IOR, MSC, T&T Salvage, P&I Club, ITOPF, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), port authorities, and state agencies, focused on streamlining the response to the MSC Elsa 3 incident. Key directives included urgent mobilisation of salvors, pollution mitigation, and regular six-hourly updates from the shipowner.

DGS is steering coordinated response operations involving central, state, and local authorities. A three-pronged salvage plan is underway addressing (i) oil recovery from the sunken vessel, (ii) drifting containers, and (iii) containers ashore. Coordination for underwater survey using multi-beam sonar has commenced to locate and assess the vessel and initiate capping of venting points. Oil extraction has been prioritised, with salvors directed to submit a revised, time-bound plan.

ICG has deployed three capital ships, aerial sorties, and vessels Samudra Prahari and ETV Water Lily to aid oil spill monitoring and containment. ICG continues aerial surveillance, identifying drifting containers; footage is awaited. Oil slick remains offshore, with dispersants deployed. Vessel hull condition is unknown—ROV inspection and capping may be required. Retrieval and tracking of containers remain a challenge as containers are not RFID tagged. Drone-based tracking of adrift containers is planned. Formal casualty investigation is ongoing, with the crew in Kochi for statements and the flag state duly informed. DGS continues to maintain daily coordination and oversight.

All parties have been asked to submit updated action plans and confirm resource mobilisation timelines. MSC is to support public advisories, salvors to provide detailed deployment schedules, and ICG to coordinate on retrieval.